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SCIENCE

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26, 1921

WHOSE BUSINESS IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH?¹

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THE larger the field of usefulness of any science or art, the more obvious its applications, the greater is its danger of exploitation. Just as real estate and insurance attract the business incompetent so does public health attract the intellectual "piker." All things to all men, dripping with statistical odds and ends, full of startling though often uncontrolled results, stamped with the hall-mark of altruism, public health draws the well-meaning and self-seeking alike. Even when based on the greatest accuracy that science affords it often becomes essentially inaccurate through the medium of its interpreters and its employment.

In this large forest of accuracies and inaccuracies, of scientific principles and their application, it would seem that one should counsel simplification rather than elaboration—and yet my idea is that we have not thought of public health in a large enough way—we have indeed failed to see the woods for the trees. What then is public health?

Let us recall, to begin with, that "health" means a normal condition not only of body but of mind and morals as well. We may stretch our definition a little further and following Henderson demand that "health" include not only a normal individual but a normal environment. The business of public health then consists in the detection, correction and prevention of the maladjustments of human life, individual and collective. The forces of public health are engaged in war against "The Kingdom of Evil." Some of you may recall the service that Southard rendered social workers in offering them an orderly classification of their labors. The analy-

¹ Address read in a Symposium on Science and the Public Health before the Pacific Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Aug. 4, 1921.